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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000108

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM KISL AJ IR

SUBJECT: IRAN: OVERVIEW OF 22 BAHMAN PROTESTS OUTSIDE TEHRAN

Classified By: Political/Economic Counselor Rob Garverick, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

**¶1.** (C) The following provides an overview of February 11/22 Bahman opposition protests and official activities in several provincial Iranian cities. Information was obtained by Baku Iran watcher via an outreach/reporting effort involving information obtained from Baku-based Iranians and multiple Iranians in each of the cities covered. The bottom line is that anti-government turnout was apparently modest in most Iranian provincial cities, with the exception of Isfahan, Shiraz, Mashad, to some extent Tabriz, and the small urban center of Shahrekord. There was considerable variation in police activities and levels of violence in the various cities tracked

**¶2.** (C) While most provincial city protests were relatively modest, anti-government turnout often exceeded turnout at officially organized "pro-government" rallies. For example, sources in the Iranian Azerbaijan city of Ardebil reported that approximately 3,000 anti-government and "less than 1,000" pro-government marchers appeared on the streets. While violent clashes occurred in several cities, sources reported no confirmed deaths as of February 12.

**¶3.** (C) Begin city-by-city 22 Bahman demonstration overview:

**¶A.** Isfahan. Sources estimated protest turnout at between 15-20,000, and pro-government marchers at "less than half" that. Clashes with Basij elements and security personnel began at approximately 10:30 AM in Engelab Square, continuing there and at other areas of the city until about 1730. Numbers of protesters increased after a body of students joined the other marchers near 33 bridge. A small group of pro-Green marchers was reportedly attacked by a mob of Basij while crossing Azer bridge; two protest marchers were allegedly thrown off (condition unknown as of February 12). Sources claimed that Isfahan police and other uniformed security forces did not participate in direct repression of green marchers, but also did nothing to interfere with Basij and plain clothes security attacks.

Sources said that hundreds of protesters were arrested by Isfahani police and other security, who received and transported to special prison holding centers individuals handed over to them by the Basij. Many thousands of Isfahanis reportedly took to rooftops that night, chanting "Allah Akbar."

**¶B.** Shiraz. Shiraz sources reported that anti-government protests began at approximately 0900. A group of protest marchers estimated at about 20,000 and was led by Ayatollah Dastgheib, a prominent supporter of Mir Hossein Moussavi.

The group reportedly chanted "death to dictatorship," and similar slogans. After about half an hour a group of approximately 1,000 Basij positioned on streets alongside the streets and park where the marchers were gathering began pelting the green marchers with stones that had been brought in by truck and dumped the previous day. Sources claimed that police took no action against the stone-throwing Basij, but later sought to block regrouping of the marchers through beatings and use of tear gas. Sources claimed that several hundred protesters were arrested, as in Isfahan.

IC. Shahrekord. An approximately 3,000-person protest march, including many high school students and other young people, allegedly started in Kabir street at approximately 12 noon. The march reached Bahunar park, where it was addressed by reformist Majlis member Nusratullah Torabi (from Khatami's faction). However, Torabi had barely begun his speech before the group was set upon by uniformed police. While a number of demonstrators were arrested, sources reported that Torabi himself was not arrested. (Note: the majority of Sharekord's population is non-Persian, including Arabs and Kurds).

ID. Mashad. Sources in Mashad reported that establishment of a massive, visible police presence in Mashad began three days before 22 Bahman. On the day itself, some of these police allegedly fired Kalashnikov rifles in the air to intimidate marchers. A large gathering of pro-green marchers was attacked by Basij outside Mashad Bagh. Local news sources claimed that approximately 100 demonstrators were arrested.

IE. Tabriz. Tabriz anti-government turnout was estimated by

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sources at approximately 5,000, with only about 1500 turning out for pro-government events, "despite free food, juice packages, and cash packets." Only minor clashes were reported.

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